

OPINION

Contributions welcome to editor@plamerican.com, (952) 345-6378

COMMENTARY

Citizens group says salary report can't pass the 'smell test'

BY WES MADER
Guest Commentary

Seven months after Citizens for Accountable Government filed its first complaint about City Hall knowingly under-reporting the city manager's salary, four members of the council voted that City Hall had done no wrong ["Prior Lake puts salary complaint to rest," July 13 Prior Lake American].

The four found no problem with the fact that City Hall posted the city manager's 2011 salary as \$117,000 when he actually was paid \$150,000 plus other financial benefits, and no problem with similar reporting in 2012. The vote was not a surprise. An opposite vote would have been an admission of lack of council oversight.

At the council's Dec. 8 meeting, City Attorney Ric Rosow assumed the posture of City Hall defense attorney, serving up a generous helping of legalese to the mayor and three attending council members to vindicate his client. Regrettably, none of the four questioned or challenged his arguments largely based on irrelevant legal references. Incredibly, the mayor and other members of city government credited City Hall with extraordinary transparency, despite the facts that City Hall made a conscious decision to under-report the manager's salary by \$33,000, that CAG's first complaint was swept under the rug with no public acknowledgement or discussion by the council, and that it was only after CAG filed a second complaint in an open and public forum that City Hall finally agreed to more accurately post the manager's salary, ironically with a disclaimer stating that the posted salary "should not be presumed as total compensation."

Council Member Soukup, one of the four, implied that CAG's complaint was based upon misinformation that CAG had heard or read, when in fact CAG first learned from a member of city government about the manager's salary being under-reported. CAG's investigation of various city documents verified that the allegation was true.

In CAG's judgment, under-reporting city manager income violates state law that was undoubtedly enacted to require disclosure of total salary. Contrary to one of the claims that Rosow pulled from his bag of legalese, it was not the intention of the Legislature that city government be permitted to use arbitrary or improper labels for large chunks of an employee's salary (like \$22,500 labeled as longevity wages) to avoid the requirement for public disclosure. The city's use of the term "longevity wages" is grossly inconsistent with the definition of "longevity pay" clearly articulated in Minnesota Regulation 3920 (Local Government Pay Equity).

LETTERS POLICY

All letters to the editor submitted for publication in the Prior Lake American will be verified before they are printed. In addition to the letter writer's name, the letter should contain an address and daytime and evening telephone numbers so the newspaper staff can verify the letter writer's identity. The Prior Lake American will not print any unverified letters, nor any letters without all the above mentioned information.

Letters that are potentially libelous will not be printed or will be edited. However, letters will not be

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CAG contacted the attorney general's office and was advised that the issue should be dealt with by the City Council. If transparency had been a reality instead of a slogan at City Hall when CAG filed its original complaint in December, City Manager Frank Boyles could have acknowledged the error, corrected it and put the issue to rest. Instead, a decision was made to lawyer up by shuffling the issue to the city attorney for rebuttal, without review or discussion by the council. That's when Rosow began acting for the interests of the city manager and not the taxpayer. After CAG's second complaint was filed openly and in public so it couldn't be ignored, the council did direct City Hall to post the city manager's total salary (but permitting the disclaimer mentioned earlier).

Subsequently Rosow requested an opinion from the attorney general. As expected, the attorney general's brief three-paragraph response clearly and specifically refused to offer an opinion, but that's apparently not the answer City Hall wanted. According to an internal city memo, Boyles then "asked Attorney Rosow to provide a memo on his (Rosow's) interpretation" of what the attorney general had said. True to form, Rosow dutifully interpreted everything to mean City Hall had done no wrong, giving the council the cover to vote as they did.

Questions remain. We wonder if the disclaimer stating that posted salary "should not be presumed as total compensation" will allow the city manager to continue to draw (without disclosure as he has done in the past) from the approximately \$100,000 account that he claims is owed to him by taxpayers for unused vacation and sick leave. In 2011, he drew \$7,200 of unreported income from this nest egg account. CAG is not aware of any public acknowledgement or discussion by the council regarding the existence of this approximately \$100,000 account, or how it came to be, and unfortunately the auditing firm that uncovered the fact did not have their contract with the city renewed.

Bottom line: This level of transparency does not pass the smell test.

Wes Mader is a member of the steering committee for Citizens for Accountable Government.

refused because staff disagrees with their content. Letters may be edited as space requires. Not all thank you letters will be printed. Writers should keep their comments under 500 words.

Letter writers are limited to one letter per month.

Letters to the editor may be sent to: Prior Lake American, P.O. Box 538, Prior Lake, MN 55372 or to editor@plamerican.com. Call Lori Carlson, editor, at (952) 345-6378 for further information.

The deadline for letters to the editor is noon Wednesdays.

NEW SUBSCRIBERS...



COMMENTARY

Learn about alum treatment of Spring Lake on July 29

BY MEGHAN JACKSON
Guest Commentary

Please join the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District Citizen Advisory Committee for a public informational meeting and question-and-answer session about the potential alum treatment of Spring Lake.

The meeting is from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Monday, July 29 at Prior Lake City Hall, 4646 Dakota St. This informational meeting will provide an opportunity for the community of Prior Lake to learn more about what an alum treatment is and why the watershed district is considering alum. Please note the watershed district board will not be making a decision about the treatment at this meeting.

Phosphorus is a nutrient that is important for animal and plant life in lake ecosystems, but too much phosphorus in the water can cause a chain reaction of undesirable events. If there is an excessive amount of phosphorus available in the water, this pollutant can cause fish kills and algal blooms that interfere with swimming, fishing and boating.

In 2011, the district

conducted a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study of Spring and Upper Prior lakes. A TMDL study evaluates the maximum amount of a pollutant that a water body can receive and still meet state water quality standards. This study found that both lakes were impaired, or threatened, by excess phosphorus, and recommended that the phosphorus concentration should be reduced by 30 percent in Upper Prior Lake and about 85 percent in Spring Lake. The study also determined that approximately half of the phosphorus in Spring Lake comes from the surrounding land and streams that drain to the lake, and the other half is released internally from the bottom of Spring Lake.

More than one approach will be needed to reduce the phosphorus concentrations in Spring and Upper Prior lakes. By implementing best-management practices, like installing raingardens and working with farmers to reduce runoff from lawns and fields, we can lessen outside watershed sources of phosphorus caused by runoff. In order to address the internal phosphorus concentrations, the watershed

district is considering an alum treatment to control the internal loading of phosphorus in Spring Lake.

Aluminum sulfate, or alum, is a nontoxic material that is commonly used in water treatment plants to clarify drinking water. In lakes, alum is used to lower the concentration of phosphorus in the water. During the treatment process, alum is applied to the water. After the solution reacts with the water, it attaches to the phosphorus and creates a fluffy white substance called floc. The floc then settles down through the water, where it eventually rests on the bottom of the lake, and prevents phosphorus from being released from the sediment.

To learn more about the potential alum treatment of Spring Lake, please come to the public informational meeting on July 29, at Prior Lake City Hall. We also have more information on our website. Go to www.plslwd.org and click on the District Projects tab to get to the Spring Lake Alum Treatment page.

Meghan Jackson is the district outreach specialist with the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District.

LETTERS

RELAY FOR LIFE

Volunteers, teams rallied against cancer

On behalf of the Relay for Life of Scott County planning committee, we would like to thank all those who helped to make this year's 16th annual "Celebrate, Remember, Fight Back" event so successful. Whether you participated on a team, volunteered or made a donation, we really appreciate your commitment to Relay and to the fight against cancer.

On July 12, 34 teams gathered at Shakopee West Junior High School's Vaughan Field to raise funds for the American Cancer

Society. Our Relay raised more than \$132,500 for patient services, education, research and advocacy. Together we have raised over \$2 million in the past 16 years here in Scott County.

While the wind was a welcome relief from the heat, it unfortunately created a few issues for our luminaria and memorial video and brought the rain that ended our evening early. Despite those few setbacks, we still enjoyed a beautiful night and celebration - remembering those lost and honoring our survivors.

A special thank you to those teams and participants who helped the Relay committee gather luminaria and clean up in record time before the rain came upon us.

We came together as family, friends, neighbors and co-workers to "Celebrate, Remember and Fight Back." We believe we accomplished that. We extend an invitation to all to come back again next year and follow us to a world without cancer and more birthdays, because when we walk, we are bigger than cancer.

The Relay for Life is about being a community that takes up the fight. There is no finish line until we find a cure. Thank you again to everyone involved with our 16th annual Relay. Let's keep up the great work and make this cancer's last century. We are making a difference in the fight against cancer!

**Brenda Stocker
Karen Kreuser
Event co-chairwomen**

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Guest columns and letters to the editor: Letters to the editor and guest commentaries stating positions on issues facing the local community are especially welcome but are reviewed by the editor prior to publication. The newspaper reserves the right to edit letters for length, grammar and clarity. We will not print letters of a libelous nature. Letters should be 500 or fewer words in length. Exceptions are at the editor's discretion. Deadline for letters is noon Wednesday before the Saturday publication date. Letters must contain the address and daytime phone number of the author, as well as a signature (except on e-mails). We prefer letters that are e-mailed to editor@plamerican.com. Editorials that appear on this page represent the institutional voice of the newspaper. Any questions or comments should be directed to the editor.

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